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NSC Senior Staff

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29 January 1952

Memorandum to Mr. Becker:

Here are a few observations about CIA support of the NSC derived from my experience as Staff Assistant. They may be of some use in your discussions with Lay and others.

1. The majority of the important policy papers coming before the NSC are prepared in the Department of State or the Pentagon, chiefly the former, and the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations have often crystallized before they are introduced in the NSC. Intelligence can make some contribution at the time these papers are considered at the Staff Assistant and Senior Staff levels. For example, I think the advice of my predecessor (Dr. Montague) about the need for urgency in extending aid to Yugoslavia, if the US was to extend assistance, resulted in beneficial amendments to the policy paper on that country. By and large, however, intelligence can be most useful in the drafting stage, when policy problems are being analyzed and decisions formulated. To contribute at this stage, CIA must be advised of projects being considered for introduction into the NSC machinery -- their scope, the principal issues involved, and the intelligence assistance needed. By the time a paper is before the NSC, the procedures for producing a national estimate are usually too lengthy to obtain a report which can have an impact on policy formulation.

We have never had a regular procedure for being alerted of policy projects likely to come before the NSC. The Staff Assistant picks up occasional leads through his contacts with other Staff Assistants, but the latter are not always aware of what is generating in the many offices of their departments. The NSC secretariat sometimes knows of papers being prepared, but it is my impression that this information is not complete or far in advance of introduction. The key contacts for alerting purposes, according to present NSC practice, are the offices of the Senior Staff members of State and Defense.

2. For important foreign policy papers coming before the NSC, the steering committee procedure has advantages for CIA, and I believe the secretariat should be encouraged to continue its use. At the Senior Staff and Staff Assistant levels, four or five representatives, under the chairmanship of a member of the NSC secretariat, can get ahead more rapidly than in the larger bodies. In the less formal surroundings of a committee, the CIA representative can contribute considerably on the basis of published estimates, staff memoranda, and his own information. It is my opinion that some of our most effective work has been done in such committees.

3. Concerning the kinds of estimates of most value in supporting the NSC, it seems to me there are two: (a) those estimating enemy intentions and capabilities in particular areas -- e.g., Indochina and Yugoslavia, and (b) those analyzing a complex and confusing problem and drawing conclusions

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from which discussion can proceed -- e.g., the importance of Middle East oil resources, Soviet atomic capabilities, the effects of a blockade of China, and the balance of advantage in East-West trade. In regard to (a), I think it would be helpful if estimates of military capabilities could always be "net" capabilities. However useful "raw" capabilities may be to military planning staffs, they merely confuse most NSC representatives. Discussions of them usually end in a JCS pronouncement which becomes the estimate.

4. As I suggested before in connection with CIA reporting to the NSC, I believe a periodic estimate, say quarterly or semi-annually, of probable trends and developments in the world situation would be of assistance in the work of the NSC. The NSC staffs now move, quite understandably, from one critical issue to another -- Korea, Iran, Germany, Indochina. Only infrequently is there an opportunity to examine US security interests in a world-wide context and to consider the relationship of one region to another. It seems to me that a periodic report, prepared by the National Estimates Board, might supply the kind of review of the world situation which would help the people connected with NSC work to take bearings and chart some future courses of action. Such a report might be scheduled on the Senior Staff agenda after its issuance and an hour or so profitably spent in discussing its contents.

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